

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

(This is the fifth of a series of articles dealing with New Jersey's 21 counties, sketching their past and present with, now and then, a peak into their future. The counties are considered in alphabetical order each week in The Newark Sunday News Magazine. Next Sunday: Cumberland County.)

TWO Cape May County traditions quickly tell the stranger how deep are the roots of those who live on the Jersey Cape. The first declares there are more "Mayflower" descendants in Cape May County than in Plymouth County, Mass.; the second declares that once a person "gets sand in his shoes" he'll never leave Cape May.

Walking down the shaded streets of Cape May Court House, where 18th and 19th Century houses spread outward from the old white court house, it's easy to understand why "sand gets in shoes." Down on the Cape itself meandering streets and old hotels bespeak the heritage of one of the nation's oldest "watering places." Cape May County bears the quiet 260-year-old pride of the Townsends and the Hands, the Leamings and the Ludlams, the Corsons and the Spicers—all of whom trace back to the beginning.

However, the county name derives from the ubiquitous Dutch captain, Cornelius Jacobsen Mey, who paid extensive attention as he maneuvered his ship Glad Tidings around the cape in 1620. Captain Mey found the climate charming—"like Holland" (which to a Hollander is the ultimate compliment)—and named the land for himself.

The Dutch made desultory attempts to colonize the land, and a few Holland adventurers fished for whales in Delaware Bay as early as 1633, but it took English colonists from New England (including Mayflower descendants) and Long Island to make Cape May whaling pay.

ON a high bluff overlooking Delaware Bay the English whalers built 13 houses and called their village "Town Bank." They sallied into the bay in small boats to battle whales weighing up to 250 tons. Life was simple, if dangerous: If no whales were captured the one-industry town faced certain collapse. More personally, a harpooned whale had to be dispatched quickly in the elemental kill-or-be-killed struggle, since his lashing tail could bring death with a single flip.

The whalers immediately beached their quarry and stripped them, turning blubber and bones into salable products worth up to \$4,000 a whale. William Penn wrote of the lucrative Cape May whaling and a 1698 writer told of the "prodigious—nay, vast—quantities" of Cape May "oyle and whalebone."

Whaling understandably had an impermanency about it, and even the establishment in 1685 of loosely defined county boundaries failed to give the Cape solidity. Dr. Daniel Coxe of London consolidated things with his 1688 purchase, sight unseen, of 95,000 Cape May acres. He never came to America, but his manorial ideas for his vast real estate holdings included two-story Coxe Hall, built by his agents and used for church meetings and for local government.

Settlers didn't get their hands on land titles until Dr. Coxe sold most of his holdings to the West Jersey Society in 1692, the year the county was officially established. Shamgar Hand,

first of a long Cape May line, bought 1,000 acres at Rummey Marsh (now Cape May Court House) in 1690; Thomas Leaming, who came in 1692 at the age of 18 to "go a whaling," got sand in his shoes and stayed. John Townsend located land in the upper part of the county in 1690 and drove his team of oxen single file along the narrow forest path to his homestead.

IT was a difficult land to colonize. Just behind the beaches on the ocean side vast marshlands (up to three miles in width) extended the length of the county. Out in the west and north impenetrable cedar forests walled Cape May off from the rest of the state. The building of the road between Egg Harbor and Cold Spring in 1706 helped immensely, but the first census in 1726 showed only 668 inhabitants in the entire county.

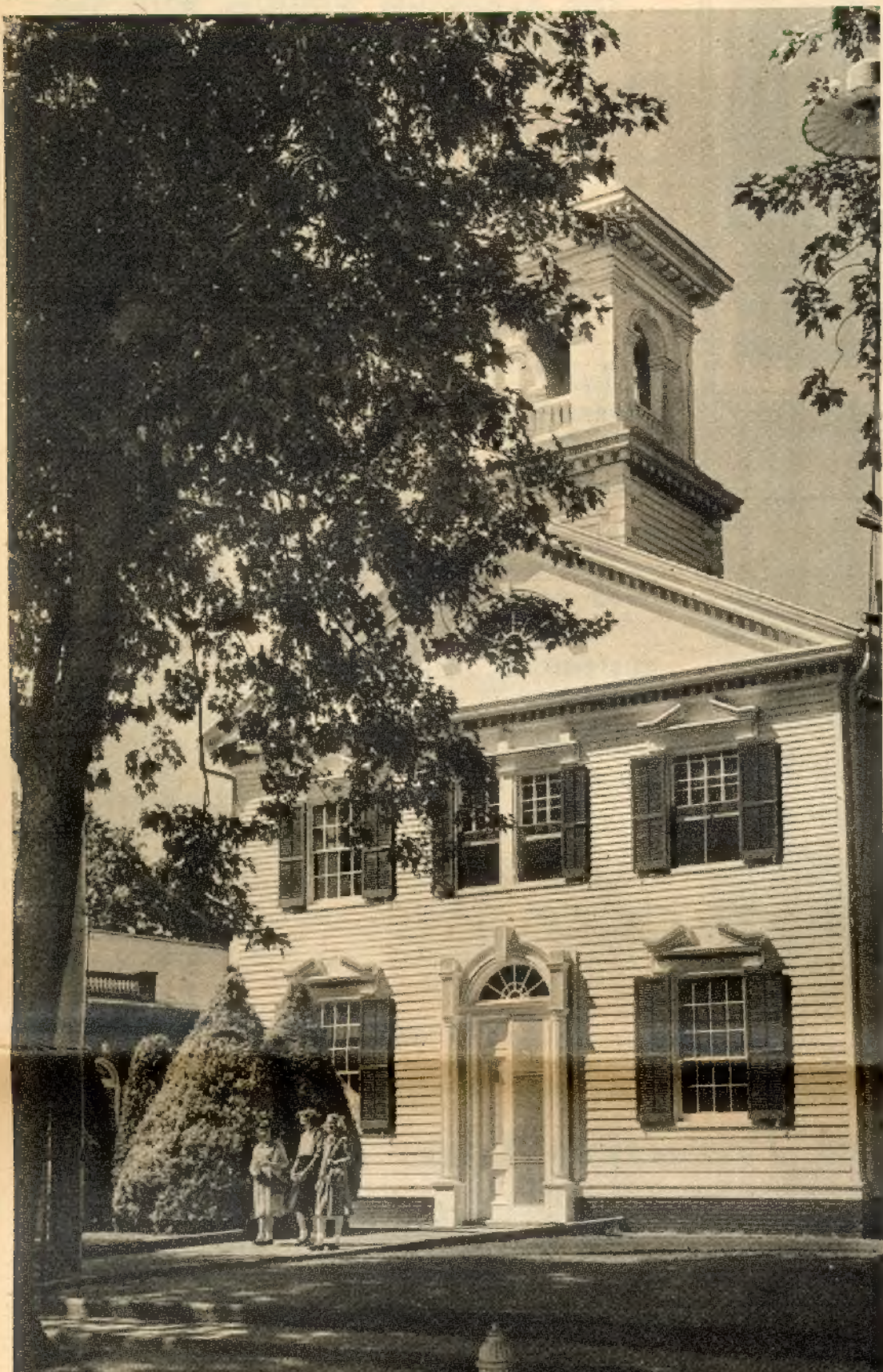
Pirates cruising off the coasts sometimes stopped for water from the Cape's cool springs or (if the folklorists are right) to bury treasure. Cattle herders along the coast occasionally saw the buccaneers. Grassy meadows covered the ocean side where cattle roamed free, identifiable by the unique Cape May "ear marks" (like that described in Anthony Ludlam's 1937 will, which noted "his Ear Mark being an El on ye underside of left ear and a slit in ye top of ye right ear").

Farms replaced the whaling villages early in the 18th Century. Fishermen, oystermen and clam diggers eked out an uncertain living in the bay and ocean. Up in the forests woodsmen began to convert the great cedars into timber.

Such was the land of Aaron Leaming 2d (born 1715) and Jacob Spicer 2d (born 1716), Cape May's most prominent early citizens. Sons of county founders, both were respected for their intelligent contributions as Cape May's representatives in the Assembly. They worked together to produce in 1758 a noted compendium of the state's early laws and concessions.

SPICER'S Cape May popularity diminished considerably in 1756, when he purchased from the West Jersey Society all unsold lands and privileges. The purchase upset Cape folk no end, since it also included rights to "hawking, fishing, hunting and fowling." In 1752 an association had been formed to buy the rights, but the association dallied while Spicer bought. The most bitter charged that Spicer's purchase price of 300 pounds was set "at a time when the influence of the wine bottle usurped the place of reason." No matter—Spicer had the rights.

Internal warring over "rights" faded in the common fight against the British, although the Revolutionary War stayed mainly out to sea. Before the fighting started Cape May pilots refused to guide tea-laden British vessels up the Delaware River. John Hatton, possessed of "an unhappy, violent temper," arrived in Cold Spring in November, 1770, to put an end to coastal smuggling. Hatton's enthusiasm for his work caused him untold



This lovely county building was built at Cape May Court House in 1849. Modern brick structure now houses most county offices.



Concrete ship was sunk off Cape May Point in 1926 as anchor of terminal for proposed ferry to Delaware. It is still proposed.

Cape May County Has Small Population but It Also Has Rich History, Fishing, Farming, Some New Industries, Summer Visitors Aplenty and More 'Mayflower' Descendants Than Plymouth

grief—and in no way stopped the smuggling.

Wartime found Cape May pilots striking at British coastwise shipping. Other residents stayed ashore to spy on British shipping, relaying information by pony express riders who galloped through the pinelands to Philadelphia.

CAPE MAY'S most important year may well have been 1801, when Ellis Hughes, proprietor of the Hotel Atlantic, placed his much-quoted ad in The Philadelphia Daily Aurora:

"The public are respectfully informed that the subscriber has prepared himself for entertaining company who use sea bathing * * *

Hughes was not the first to proclaim the virtues of Cape May as a "watering place," nevertheless. Rev. Samuel Finley, pastor of the Cold Spring Presbyterian Church from 1740 to 1742, spoke often of the merits of Cape May bathing, even after he became president of Princeton College in 1761. Many physicians lauded the Cape's health-giving potentialities before Hughes.

The difference was that Hughes aimed to be a host . . .

Others took in visitors too, so that by 1812 local folk counted on Summer dollars from Philadelphia guests. Already the Cape was far different from what the whalers had known; Town Bank was completely gone, washed away by the relentless sea (which by known measurement cut 169 feet off the Cape May beaches between 1804 and 1822).

The War of 1812 interrupted the Summer visiting, and residents at Cape May Point laboriously dug a huge ditch from the ocean to keep the British from getting fresh water from Lilly Lake. The salt water flowed into the lake through ditches cut through 16-foot-high sand dunes.

A SLOOP started regular service between the island and Philadelphia in 1815, the year before Thomas H. Hughes, son of Ellis, built the original Congress Hall. People laughed at "Tommy's Folly," but big, hearty Tommy replied:

"The day will come when you'll have to cover every square inch here with a silver dollar to get enough land to put up a house!"

Tommy's prediction stood up as visitors started to arrive from Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington and the South—"as many as 3,000 in a single Summer," according to an 1840 historian. In 1853 work began on the Mount Vernon, largest hotel in the world at the time. Builder Philip Cain startled the resort by erecting Mount Vernon's front section 300 feet wide and four stories high, then added a wing 500 feet long and three stories high. Proprietor Cain's dream of a third 500-foot wing and accommodations for 2,100 guests vanished in a fire on September 5, 1855. Cain and five others died in the blaze.

Cape May town was the most famous resort in the nation in the 1850s (local promoters said, ignoring the claims of Saratoga and Long Branch). Southern planters and the elite of the North exchanged discreet and genteel opinions in the glittering hotels. Visiting plantation owners whiled away their time and whittled away their fortunes in such gambling houses as Henry Cleveland's "Blue Pig."

FAMOUS people came, too—such as President Franklin Pierce in 1855 and President James Buchanan in 1858 (and, oh yes, an obscure Illinois politician named Abe Lincoln slept in the Mansion House in 1849).

Never, however, was there a Cape May visitor like Henry Clay . . .

Summer crowds had started to disappear from the Cape in August, 1847, when "Harry of the West" asked for reservations at the Mansion House to spend a quiet week in mourning for his son killed in the Mexican War. Word leaked out, much to the satisfaction of the local bonifaces, and the outward-bound streamed back to greet Clay on his arrival from Philadelphia August 16.

Golden-voiced Henry went swimming twice a day and possibly enjoyed it despite the vigorous ladies who chased him with scissors to clip off locks of his hair. ("When he returned to Washington," said one writer, "his hair was short indeed!") A New York delegation waited on Clay with an invitation but he refused in a moving declaration of grief for his son which made his until-then griefless audience weep openly.

INLAND, Cape May County grew, too, albeit slowly. The county didn't have a physician until 1786, when Dr. John Dickinson moved down from Salem. Education consisted of itinerant tutors on horseback until 1830 when the first crude schoolhouses were built. Religious groups had solid foundations—the Baptists having been established at Cape May Court House in 1712, the Presbyterians at Cold Spring in 1714 and the Quakers at Seaville in the early 1700s.

Cape May Court House, named county seat in 1745, rightfully took pride in its handsome new court house built in 1849 (at a cost of \$6,284, including a 333-pound bell cast for \$99.33). The ferry at Beasley's Point, established in 1692, flourished. Nearby, Tuckahoe had a busy shipbuilding background. Out in Western cedar lands, Dennis Creek prospered from shipbuilding, timber cutting and from cedar shingles "mined" from the swamps—and Dennis Creek could boast that its 1802 post office was the county's first, and that its shingles were used on the roof of Philadelphia's Independence Hall.

On the verandas in Cape May City in the Summer of 1860 bitter-sweet

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Stately lighthouse at Cape May Point, erected in 1859 on site of another beacon, tells of county's former dependence on sea.



Cape May City which attracted its first Summer visitors from Philadelphia in 1801, is pictured in century-old woodcut above. Quaint, rambling hotels still feature beach front, seen below from air, despite resort's devastating fires in 1869 and 1878.





County's famed seashore resorts include Ocean City, above, and Wildwood, below, which attracts 100,000 visitors each Summer.



Eugene G. Grace left Goshen birthplace here in 1899 to take a job with Bethlehem Steel Corp., 14 years later was president.

CAPE MAY

(Continued from Preceding Page)

discussion centered on the Breckinridge-Lincoln Presidential campaign. As the Southerners returned to their plantations in August the wiser of the Cape May residents knew an era had passed. The wiser were right. The assault on Fort Sumter shattered forever the veranda quietude.

DESPITE its position well below the Mason-Dixon Line and its annual seasonal influx of Southern blood, Cape May quickly supported the Union cause. Off to war went its young men, including Lt. Henry W. Sawyer—who did well and on the morning of June 9, 1863, went into battle with his newly won captain's commission.

Rebel troops captured Sawyer that day and sent him to the infamous Libby Prison. There, on July 6, he was called into the prison yard with other imprisoned captains and told that two of them must die in retaliation for the execution of two Confederate captains within Union lines. Sawyer and Capt. Flynn of Indiana drew the grim assignment. Immediately the Secretary of War informed the South that if Sawyer and Flynn died the North would execute Gen. Lee (son of Gen. Robert E. Lee) and Gen. Winder, Union prisoners. The South readily exchanged the Union captains for the two Confederate generals.

Union veterans returned to a changed Cape May in 1865. A railroad had been built down the Cape in 1863. County population had jumped to nearly 7,500 but five-sevenths of the Cape remained undeveloped. More than 50,000 visitors came in 1866, the year *The New York Herald* declared:

"If they (vacationists) want a fast place, let them go to Saratoga; if they want a place where people 'are content to dwell in decencies forever' let them go to Cape May * * *"

NEW Stockton Hall was opened in 1869, the year President Grant visited. Mrs. Grant set the ladies of the resort to sewing madly on red and blue flannel bathing suits—imitations of those Mrs. Grant bought from a local tailor.

President Grant shook hands, of course (but not nearly as many as the 2,500 hands President Arthur shook in a single evening during his 1883 stay).

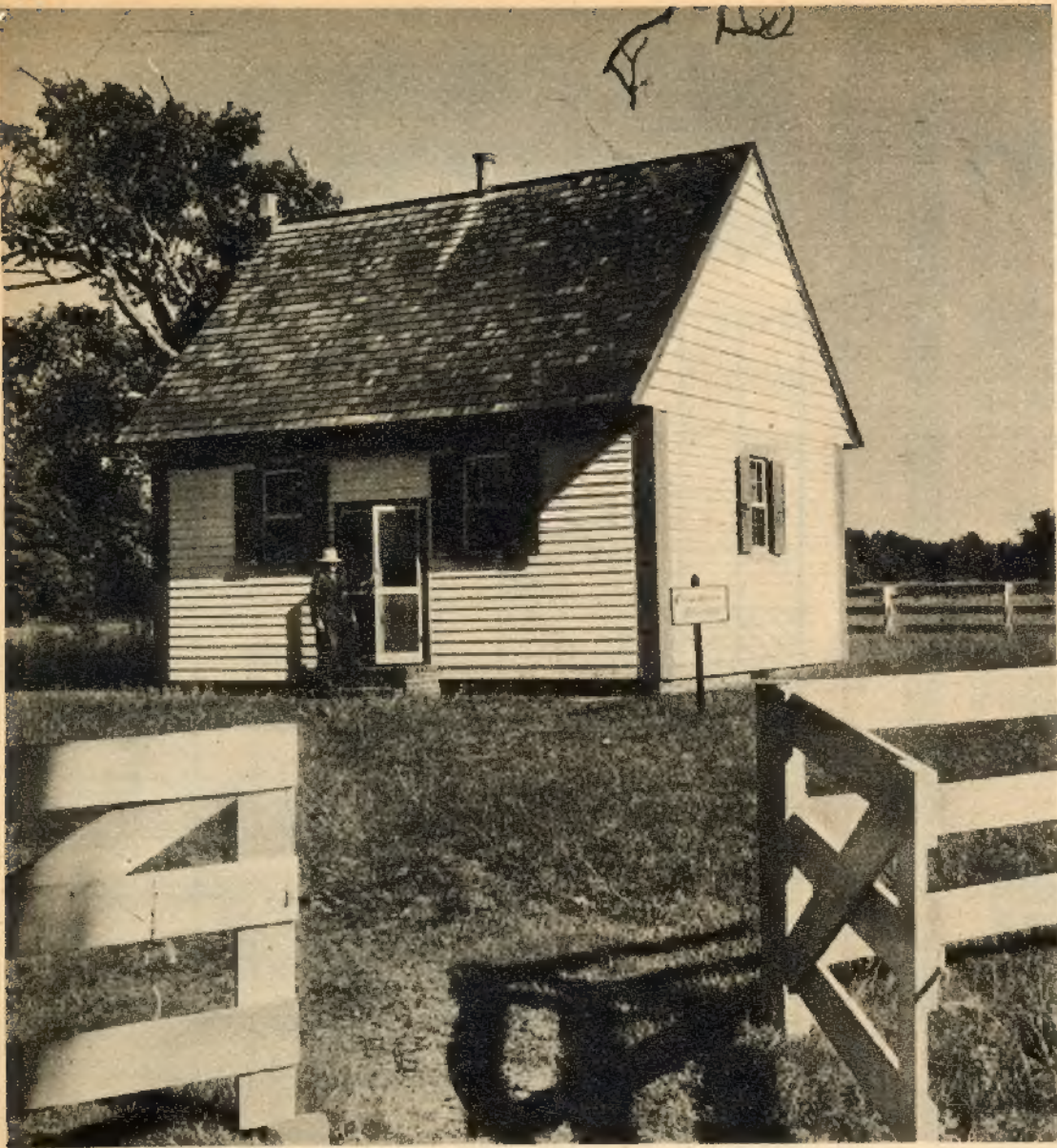
Old Cape May town perished in the decade from 1869 to 1879. First, an 1869 fire ruined a quarter of the business section, including several old hotels. Then, on November 9, 1878, flames swept through 35 acres of buildings in the heart of the city, leveling most of the best hotels and private cottages. Many secretly expressed the belief, however, that the fire was a blessing in horrible disguise—since it would permit rebuilding with some planning for the future.

Varying industries sought to exploit Cape May's natural advantages in the years after the Civil War. The Porpoise Fishing Co. opened a factory on Pond Creek in 1868 to make porpoise skins into leather, refine porpoise fat into oil and make "dolphin steaks" from the flesh. Commercial fishing of all kinds reached such proportions in the 1880s that local residents protested violently (sometimes reinforcing their vocal protests by shooting at commercial vessels).

Up county at Rio Grande a group of Philadelphia promoters planted 2,000 acres of sugar cane, their initiative strengthened by state bounties of \$1 a ton for all cane grown and 1 cent a pound for all sugar refined. The Rio Grande Sugar Co. made 76,000 pounds of sugar and 87,000 gallons of syrup in 1884, but termination of the state bounty in 1885 doomed the venture. Cape May's southern exposure, by the way, has tempted various other agricultural experiments, ranging from licorice growing to mulberry tree culture and the use of sea lavender for honey.

Most important was the interest shown in the 1880s in the extensive pasture lands along the entire ocean front where the rolling Summer surf on the best beaches in the state served only to cool herds of free-roaming cattle.

OCEAN CITY grew from a temperance colony and Methodist Summer resort started on Peck's Beach in 1880 by three minister brothers named Lake. Just to the south, Charles K. Landis (founder of Vineland and Ham-monton) in 1880 laid out Sea Isle City.



Old Cedar Meeting House in Seaville, center of old Quaker settlement, was built in 1716, 14 years after the group was organized.

which by 1893 had 30 hotels and was known far for its brilliant electric lighting.

Philip Pontius Baker of Vineland founded Wildwood in 1890 on Five Mile Beach, a spot known for its natural magnificence. Just back from the beach tremendously tall cedars cooled visitors and gigantic grape vines and festoons of moss hanging from the trees delighted the eye.

John Wanamaker, Philadelphia merchant, took such pride in Cape May Point (founded in 1875 as Sea Grove) that he invited President and Mrs. Harrison to visit him. Friends built a \$10,000 cottage and presented it to the Harrisons when they arrived in 1890.

Contrasting with down-Cape gaiety was the establishment in 1891 of the Jewish colony at Woodbine, where 62 farms of 30 acres each were laid out for refugees who had fled Russian persecution. The new colonists bought farms—complete with farmhouse, out-buildings and stock—for \$1,200 apiece. Woodbine prospered, within a year had 700 inhabitants.

A FEW miles south of Woodbine young Eugene G. Grace left his birthplace in Goshen in June, 1899, for a job with the Bethlehem Steel Corp. Fourteen years later the village heard with pride that young Gene had been named president of the tremendous steel company.

Another young man of eventual fortune, Henry Ford, brought a racing car to the Cape in 1903 to enter the automobile races on the flat, hard-packed beach. He tried to sell stock in his automobile company but most refused to buy. Ford lost the races and had to sell one of his cars to Daniel Focer in town in order to get funds to return home. Later Focer gained the nation's first Ford franchise and many years later James Couzens (who became a U. S. senator from Michigan) sold at tremendous profit the \$5,000 in stock he had bought from Ford at Cape May.

County leaders sought at the Turn-of-the-century to start a much-needed ferry to the State of Delaware. In 1900 a side-wheeler made several unsatisfactory runs and in 1903 the 200-foot steamer Caroline tried unsuccessfully to establish service. Through the

years abortive attempts have been made to link the states by ferry, including the 1926 effort which saw "Colonel" Jesse Rosenfeld of Baltimore sink an old concrete ship off Cape May Point as the anchor for a ferry terminal. The old ship still rests in the water (and a proposed ferry is still on the 1952 planning charts).

TODAY Cape May County has as close a tie to the past as any county in New Jersey. Descendants of old families are plentiful and united. Cape May city's streets show their derivation from the unplanned growth of the 18th Century. Old houses are numerous and well kept (and the magnet for an annual Summer historical pilgrimage). The old Cape May Point light-house tells of the county's former dependence on the sea.

Industry has come in, notably a multimillion-dollar magnesite plant on Cape May Point and the industries clustered about the modern county airport. Yet fishing, farming and catering to visitors remain the Cape's principal occupations. Commercial fishermen frequent the off-Cape waters, particularly the Spring mackerel fleets, and sport fishing is an important source of income. Farm lands extend all the way up the western edge of the county and through the northern part, many of them producing on contract for Seabrook Farms in Cumberland County

CAPE MAY COUNTY remains a "watering place" of much dignity, however, particularly in the older resort towns. Each year more than 350,000 visitors come to stay in the hotels and cottages and to relax on the long, sloping beaches. Nevertheless, visitors following "the flight from the gull" on the Ocean highway from Ocean City to Cape May are struck by the great areas of as yet undeveloped oceanfront. The Cape's uninhabited stretches of land continue to attract birds (and bird watchers) as the Cape maintains its status as a bird haven.

Sometimes visitors get sand in their shoes. Then they stay on—and there's lots of room, since only 37,131 people were counted in the 1950 census.

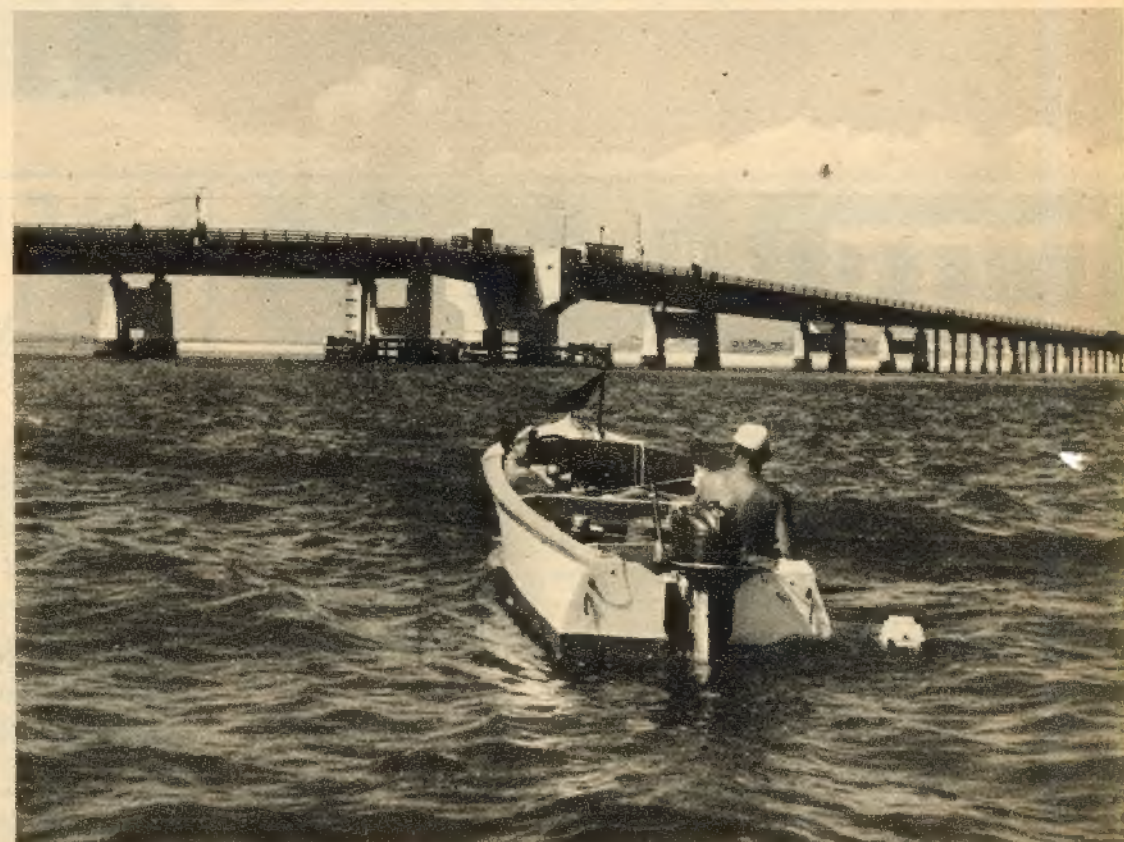
Quickly the newcomers absorb the traditions and cherish them. It's easy to do.



Sea Isle City's fishing fleet uses Inland Waterway as its home basin. Town, with many canals, is known as "Venice of America."



Cape May County which got its name from Cornelius Mey, was unsuccessfully colonized by Dutch. The English came later and stayed.



Townsend's Inlet Bridge, connecting Sea Isle City and Avalon, is part of Ocean Front Drive with symbol, "Follow Flight of Gull."